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THAI GOVERNMENT'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN DISORGANIZED

The Thanom regime continues to have trouble getting organized to campaign for next February's legislative elections.

The initial session of the government's Saha Pracha Thai party failed to live up to the expectations of government leaders. The meeting in Bangkok was designed to generate enthusiasm among the party's rank and file and to move ahead with organizational details, but was marked instead by factional quarrels and heated attacks on the high-handed tactics of government spokesmen.

Most of the protests came from politicians close to Deputy Prime Minister Praphat. Brought into the government party via the Praphat-organized Free People's League, these men may believe they had certain assurances about their role in the government party that are now being circumvented by the party's organizers. Their protests apparently were similar to those they made earlier about not being consulted on such fundamental issues as party membership and campaign tactics. Conciliatory gestures by Prime Minister Thanom and other government leaders during the meeting have so far forestalled an open split, but their differences obviously have not been reconciled.

Dissatisfaction among the rank and file has come at a time when party leaders have only begun to smooth over their own differences about party policies. One government official claims that the factions are still working at cross-purposes in recruiting members and potential candidates for the government party.

It seems likely that Praphat's rival, Prime Minister Thanom, who has been criticized for his leadership deficiencies, has lost some ground in the current situation. Thanom was unusually caustic in discussing his political woes during a recent press conference in Bangkok. He made it clear that he has little appetite for the give-and-take of party politics.

The campaign itself is off to a fairly slow start. Much of the activity thus far has centered in the northeast, where antigovernment sentiment is strongest. Leftist splinter parties, which hope to deny the government a clear majority in the legislature, have held rallies in a number of the region's larger towns. The government party's efforts have been desultory so far.

NND 931506-968

JAPAN'S PRIME MINISTER FACES PARTY ELECTIONS

Prime Minister Sato is expected to be re-elected president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party next week, but recent events in Okinawa may narrow his margin of victory and will probably complicate his task of dealing with the sensitive issues of Okinawa's reversion and US base rights.

Neither of Sato's two challengers, former foreign minister Miki and faction leader Maeo, appear to have enlisted sufficient support to unseat Sato. Even some of Sato's opponents concede that factions not formally aligned with Sato and whose support would be indispensable for an upset victory by one of the challengers now lean heavily toward the prime minister.

The crash of a B-52 in Okinawa on 19 November has touched off an acerbic debate on the Okinawan problem between Sato and his two challengers. Sato, who is seeking a third term as party president, will now come under renewed pressure from within his party to take a firm stand with the US on the postreversion status of the bases on the island.

Up to this point, Sato has argued that his uncommitted public stand on the status of the Okinawan bases would expedite reversion and best serve Japan's security interests. In contrast, Miki and Maeo advocate the same restrictions that now apply to US bases in Japan--prior consultations on use of bases and no storage of nuclear weapons. Sato's opponents, however, basically support the broad framework of US-Japan relations.

Maeo, apparently without much success, has attempted to make personal gain by claiming that Sato's failure to devise a clear formula for early reversion contributed to the defeat of the conservative candidate for chief executive in Okinawa. On the other hand, Miki's position in the party probably suffered as a result of the Okinawan leftist's victory; Miki's associates were in charge of Liberal Democratic efforts in support of the conservative candidate.

Despite these recent setbacks in Okinawa, Sato's prospects for re-election do not seem to be in serious jeopardy. In view of Sato's apparently fairly narrow margin, however, a major political blunder before the convention could erase his lead.

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NND 931506-969